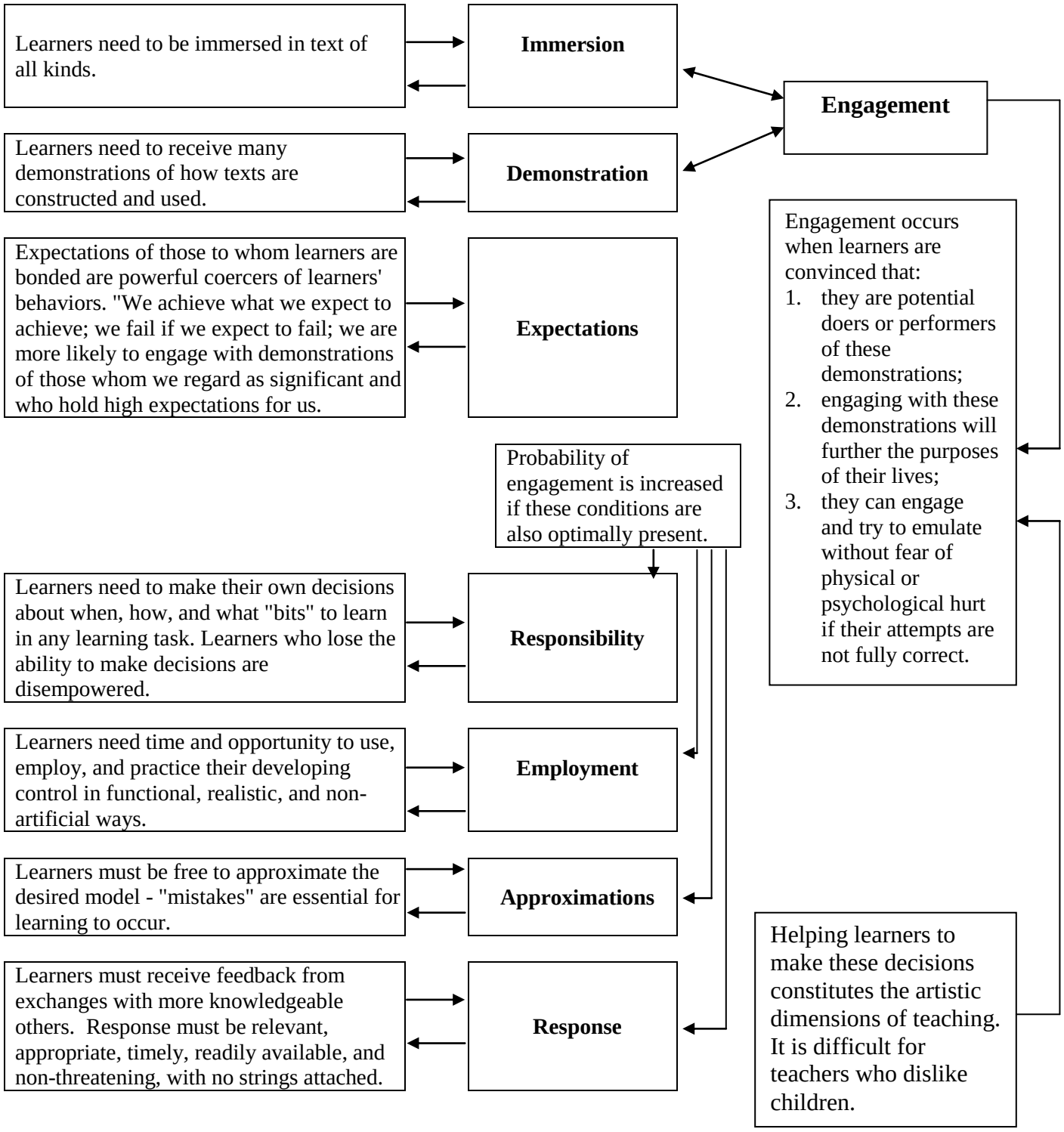
Cambourne's Conditions of Learning:
A Model of Learning as it Applies to Literacy



From: Cambourne, Brian. (1995) "Toward An Educationally Relevant Theory Of Literacy Learning: Twenty Years Of Inquiry". *The Reading Teacher*, Vol. 49, No. 3.

Balanced Early Literacy: Classroom Environment: The Natural, Optimum Language Learning Environment

In a natural, optimum, print-rich learning environment, teachers have the opportunity to create conditions where:

1. Children's interest is sparked by what they see and hear so that they *want* to learn the new skill (immersion – *see below for full description of terms*)
2. Children believe that they can achieve competence (expectation)
3. Children are able to make decisions about how much they will attempt (responsibility)
4. Children are safe from criticism when they take risks (approximation)
5. Children are shown numerous models and given a lot of direct instruction (demonstration)
6. Children have plenty of opportunity to practice new skills and strategies and try to improve proficiency (demonstration/immersion)
7. Children receive praise and encouragement from teachers and peers (feedback)

The Seven Conditions of Natural Language Learning

(Brian Cambourne)

Immersion

From the moment they are born, children are surrounded by meaningful spoken language. They are "immersed" in a "language flood." Proficient users of the language of the culture into which children are born surround them with the sounds, meanings, cadences, and rhythms of the language. It is important to remember that this language is *meaningful* and *purposeful.*

Demonstration

In the process of learning to talk, children receive thousands and thousands of demonstrations (models or examples) of the spoken form of the language being used in functional and meaningful ways. The "demonstration" of the conventions that are used to express meanings is repeated over and over again. In this way, learners are given the information that enables them to adopt the conventions they need to use to be speakers of the language of their culture.

Expectation

Unless their infant is severely disabled, parents expect their children to learn to speak. These expectations are subtle forms of communication to which children respond. We let children know that they will learn to walk and talk, even though walking and talking may be complicated. We know that, as they are watching and listening, they will sort out movements, steps, and the complexities of language. If we give off the idea that learning to read, write, spell, and learn another language is difficult, complex, and beyond the grasp of some children, then they will respond accordingly. The kids in the "Green Stars" group eventually learn to read, write, and spell like "Green Stars" because we expect them to.

Responsibility
When learning to talk, children are left to take responsibility for what they learn. They master grammatical structures at different ages. Some will talk "fluently" and appear to reason well for their 4 or 5 years; others will move more slowly. By 6 1/2 years, however, most children talk with ease and express themselves well. The point is that they arrived at the same point by different routes. This is natural learning. If we took away this responsibility, our children may never have learned to talk.

Approximation
Young learners using the oral mode of language are not expected to display full-blown competence from the beginning. Parents often reward young children not just for being right, but for coming close – that is, for their approximations. Children should be rewarded the same privilege with respect to the written language. When a child writes, "WSAPANATM" (Once upon a time), it's time for celebration!

Employment
We provide our children with plenty of opportunities to learn to talk as they grow. We don't ask our children to wait until "talking time" comes around to use the conventions of oral language. We do not restrict children to twenty minutes a week to learn the formal conventions of language. We likewise shouldn't restrict children's frequent employment of print. In classrooms, we need to provide children with many opportunities to engage in using the medium of print.

Feedback
The evidence from Tambourine's studies (and others) is quite conclusive. Older siblings, older adults, and parents who are with young children during their early years of learning to talk give them a very special kind of feedback. The feedback is always nurturing. The response contains the "acceptable" conventions of language without unnecessary attention to the child's errors. This type of feedback mirrors how teachers of the young support children as they learn to write, plan, and revise their work. Providing this feedback means giving children many chances to see good writing and hear quality reading.

Source: The School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA
http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/teachers/frameworks/bel/content/bel_b002.htm